



Diasporic Home: Existence of Widows in Bapsi Sidhwa's Water

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Abstract— *Water*, published in 2006, brings to light the contentious issues with patriarchy, widowhood, and child prostitution in India prior to the partition. This essay focuses on how widows adjust to life in Ashram, a frequently visited destination on their migratory routes. The main protagonist in the novel *Water*, Chuyia, is an example of an immigrant who is compelled to abandon everything connected to their own culture and adopt the new standard of living in the host community. The author provides voice to oppressed women, especially widows, and demonstrates how “husbandless” women are stigmatized and suffer heinous abuse, which causes them to feel alienated. A close illustration of the caste systems in the political and historical frameworks of the novel will be done in order to discuss the identity crisis of the diasporic character in *Water*. This will reveal the fundamental power relations among male-dominated heteronormative discourses that produce male dominance and make women's dominance a suitable cultural norm. I contend that widows' homemaking is a dynamic process that entails continual concern in connection to identity performance and adjustments in this research, rather than being a static replica of their prior houses. I use the concepts of cultural authenticity and identity development to support modern notions of the diasporic home. My study proposes a fundamental tool for analyzing widows, which is an immigrant tale, and gives a novel perspective that undermines facile associations between homemaking and established identities.

Keywords— alienation, diaspora, displacement, home, patriarchy



I. INTRODUCTION

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in India before the partition of India. After independence, she completed her studies in Pakistan and then immigrated to Houston, America. Set against the backdrop of Gandhi's Freedom Movement, the novel focuses on a gaggle of widows from different parts of India condemned by Hindu law to spend the rest of their lives in an ashram, an institution established by the Indian patriarchal society to supply shelter and protection because they are widows, and to spend the rest of their lives in penance to achieve salvation. Widows at the ashram experience acute challenges and social marginalization, which suggests that they are subject to prolonged conflict. Social isolation and being marginalized from the rest of society lead to solitude and homelessness. This solitude is the result of external circumstances, the hegemonic caste

system, and cultural hierarchy, which affect the inner psyches of the widows.

The 2006 novel *Water*, a 1930s-era work by Bapsi Sidhwa, tells the story of Chuyia, a young girl who was forced to live in an ashram for widows after becoming a widow at the age of eight. According to Anita Sharma's "Victimization of Women: With Particular Reference to Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels," women are portrayed in traditional societies as being victims of the male world and the roles that are imposed on them by the patriarchal caste system. Unspoken structural violence is intimately related to social injustice and impacts widows in different ways, depending on the different types of societal norms and taboos. It highlights the gender relations, political dynamics, and cultural predominance of patriarchal institutions. The novel offers not only a historical account of widows' living circumstances in Indian culture but also

a sober examination of how to change societal conventions that discriminate against women.

The social arrangement known as caste, which is common in India, establishes a clear hierarchical structure. Caste and other socioeconomic status indicators are closely associated, with people from higher castes often having better lives in most ways than people from lower castes. The most pertinent aspect of this issue is that higher castes frequently impose greater limitations and accord lesser status to women and widows in particular. Widows are prohibited from wearing coloured clothing and are subject to a number of restrictive rules that Hindu patriarchal culture has set in place. It's crucial to maintain their freedom and carry on living their life in the same manner as they did before relocating to an ashram. It's crucial to make the dwelling actually seem like a "home."

II. DISCUSSION

2.1. The concept of Diaspora

According to Borgohain, I., and Ammari, D., the phrase "Indian diaspora" is a broad word used to describe individuals who move either across international boundaries or across the states and territories that are now a part of the Republic of India (2022, p. 222). They continue on to assert that even while individuals are still within the boundaries of the same nation, they leave their familiar surroundings, travel across states and territories, and encounter what they interpret as foreignness. The diasporic journey is apparent when Chuyia and the other widows from various states and regions are transferred to a widow's ashram, a facility for widows, where they must spend the remainder of their lives in atonement (p. 222).

Furthermore, the widows fit within Clifford's definition of diaspora, for they are involved in an internal movement that simply entails shifting from one region to another. In *Cultural Anthropology* (1994), James Clifford defines "diaspora" as "movement to a foreign land that is not limited to movement to a foreign land but can also be a simple shift from one region to another within one's own country, as long as it leads to cultures of displacement." He defines diaspora as a shared, ongoing displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance. They experience displacement in the form of longing, memory, and (dis)identification, which leads to alienation (pp. 302–38). Indrani A. Borgohain and Deema Ammari claim in "Between the Homeland and Diaspora" (2022) that "the characters who are in their own country are members of ethnic minorities who coexist with the mainstream culture and face hardships in its outlying regions" (p. 221). The concept is that these ethnic communities, namely widows, are a symbol of deprivation and a declaration that one

belongs to another homeland. They have been driven from their native home and are now living in exile, yet they still long to return. Moreover, Borgohain and Ammari (2022) contend that "the diaspora is not characterized by biographical ties across geographical places, as Paul Gilroy contends in his article "Diaspora," but rather by and through difference" (p. 221).

In "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" (1991), William Safran presents his argument that the definition of diaspora today has changed. More specifically, "diasporic communities" are used as metaphors for various groups of people, including immigrants, refugees, and members of racial and ethnic minorities, much like how the term "ghettoization" has come to refer to a variety of restricting urban environments (p. 83). He proceeds on to assert that populations, such as members of ethnic or religious groups who are originally from the same location but have settled in other regions, also fall within the definition of diaspora. Safran identifies emotions of rejection, alienation, or isolation as other features of diaspora. Diasporas, according to Movindri Reddy in "Transnational Locality: Diasporas and Indentured South Asians" (2015), are both insiders and outsiders of the nation-state. They are referred to as internally displaced people since they relocate within national boundaries rather than across international borders. They are separated from other national ethnic groups while simultaneously being identified as Indians (Reddy, 2015, 2). They evacuate the homeland they call home because of anxiety about intimidation for reasons of race, religion, political or civil unrest, and interference in their birthplace (pp. 1–17).

These widows are displaced and subjugated by the patriarchal norms of society when they cross the border. Clifford (1994) goes on to say that displacement occurs in two stages, the first of which is physical and the second of which is psychological. The widows are forced to manoeuvre to the alien land as a result of the physical or territorial displacement, which results in psychological alienation or displacement. Diasporic migrants seek to establish themselves in this adoptive community and call it home, but Ashram's rules make it difficult or impossible for them to do so. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2002), displacement is the erosion of a valid and active sense of self due to movement, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or "voluntary" removal for indentured labour, or it can be the result of cultural denigration, which is the intentional or unintentional oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a purportedly superior racial or cultural model (p. 9). As a result, they lack a secure sense of belonging due to the vulnerability of their position within their homeland.

2.2. The concept of Home

Scholarly work on cultural identity and “homes” has been characterized by key themes since its inception. Home is where one resides and belongs, of course, but authors and critics frequently go beyond the physical location to connect a sense of home to one’s identity and personality. Although India is their birthplace and the domain of the widows’ experiences constitutes historical memory, “home” justifies its status as a contradictory site of resistance and confinement, both physically and psychologically. In Indian culture, what does the term “home” mean? Who constructs the space and/or the concept of “home”? What is the definition of a home’s space? These questions might help us understand how the concept of “home” is constructed and its implications in Indian society.

When it comes to the diasporic context, “home” is projected as a place of pastoral stability, community, and emotional comfort, but that concept has been heavily contested. We frequently associate our home with our house, but in most cases, people describe a home as more of a feeling than a structure. As Marcus Cooper points out, “home” as a dwelling includes a deep psychological connotation that extends beyond the role of providing comfort and shelter. It is an area where domestic behaviour takes place (1974, pp. 36–140). A home’s characteristics both affirm social identity and serve as a vehicle for expressing identity.

The diasporic home is not a reality or identity that has evolved naturally. The cultural context of patriarchal social norms shapes the diasporic home in *Water*. Due to tight migratory limitations brought on by traditional Hindu patriarchal customs, widows have few options when it comes to homemaking. The home’s approach, particularly from a social and psychological standpoint, represents different coping mechanisms and ways of life in ashrams, which serve as widows’ host groups. Homemaking is constrained by historical conditions and constraints; therefore, it can never be totally self-styled. Due to societal pressure and, occasionally, stigma, diasporic homemaking is a shared experience and societal exertion. Widows abandoning their performances of the original home pattern is unhomely and adds to the complexity of home performances in their new adopted communities. Homi Bhabha claims in “The World and the Home” (1992) that being “unhomely” is not a state of not having a home but rather a shaky recognition that the line between the world and the home is blurring, drawing on Sigmund Freud’s concept of the “uncanny” or “unheimlich” (“unheimlich”). “Uncanny” or “unhomely” in Freud’s concept refers to the alienated sense of experiencing something familiar yet menacing, which lies within the boundaries of the intimate

and is the result of repression. According to Thembisa Waetjen’s article “The ‘Home’ in Homeland” (1999), “unhomeliness is a state of exile, of being removed from a place of belonging, rather than a state of homelessness” (p. 662). Lois Tyson describes “unhomeliness” (Tyson, 2014, p. 421) as the feelings of displacement and fragmentation that a colonized subject feels. Bhaba continues, “The boundary between home and world becomes muddled as a result of this displacement, and the private and public become inextricably intertwined, imposing a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (pp. 141–153). The recesses of domestic space became sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In the novel *Water*, it results in significant changes in well-being. In addition to displacing widows from their primary abode, it also interferes with their sense of belonging at the ashram and their sense of home.

2.3. Chuya’s diasporic home in *Water*

Water is set in 1938, when India was still under colonialism, in the milieu of Gandhi’s rise to power. The novel is based on the treatment of Hindu widows in traditional Indian society. Sidhwa’s novel is a satire on society’s behaviour towards women and widows in particular, and it illustrates the Indian religious society that raises questions and challenges the patriarchal society. According to Indrani A. Borgohain (2020), “since time immemorial, women have been silenced by patriarchal societies in most, if not all, cultures. Women’s voices are ignored, belittled, mocked, interrupted, or shouted down” (p. 10). According to Demir and Acar, “the patriarchy concept, which establishes male supremacy in society, is a type of organization that defines every social, political, economic, and cultural decision and relationship regarding men or male mentality” (1997, p. 31). This legitimate demonstration of power is based on the concept of male sovereignty over economic, political, social, and cultural areas, which is imposed on society by culture, reinforcing the ideology that women are dependent on men. In Indian patriarchal society, the family is one of the important institutions and primary agencies of socialization. As the head of the family, a man is entitled to ownership over his wife and children as a father or husband, and the institution of marriage holds a prominent place in society, which women usually respect. Women are never allowed to participate in decision-making and are constantly isolated and alienated. Through their daily activities and narratives, the novel demonstrates how widows are displaced, alienated, and constantly resist, contest, and negotiate with this domination and violence.

In Hindu society, a widow is considered an outcast and is looked down upon as a sinner who is blamed for the death of her husband. Her personal needs and desires are ignored by society. Without a husband, they are a source of

panic and anxiety. So, according to patriarchal ideology, the institution of widowhood, or “Ashram,” is designed for widows, and they congregate, forming new communities. As Benedict Anderson argues, new imagined communities emerge and form a new community known today as the “New Diaspora” (1991, pp. 6-7). These diasporic characters within the homeland are again doubly marginalized: first as being women, and secondly, they are treated unholy, which leaves them alienated. *Water* explores the utilization of Hindu religious discourse to regulate women in widowhood and how they are forced to choose a path of self-deprivation.

The protagonist of the novel, Chuyia, which implies “small mouse” in Hindi, is a six-year-old Brahmin child who enjoys a carefree life plucking gooseberries and litchis with her two brothers. Her carefree life is halted when her father, Somnath, who is a Hindu priest, gets her married to a 44-year-old widowed Brahmin, Hira Lal. Sidhwa demonstrates how marriages in India are practiced as social contracts negotiated between the patriarchal heads of the bride’s and bridegroom’s families. This type of marriage with elderly men is common in society, and women must remain silent in the face of all the torture. Somnath, Chuyia’s father, says, “A girl is destined to leave her parents’ home early, or else she will bring disgrace to it. She is safe and happy only in her husband’s care” (p. 7). A woman’s only productive work is considered to be getting married and begetting children, as Somnath says that “a woman is recognized as a person only when she is with her husband” (p. 8). Her father says, “Only when a woman is with her husband is she revered in the Brahmanical tradition. She can only become a sumangali, an auspicious woman, after that. (p. 14). Somnath further says,

You are the daughter and spouse of Brahmin priests; undoubtedly, you are familiar with our customs, which do not recognize the existence of wives outside of marriage. A woman’s role in life is to get married and have sons. That is why she is created to have sons! That’s all! (pp. 8-9)

A woman’s only role is to procreate and serve her husband’s family, according to Hindu scriptures. It propounds that girls are not given the right to get equal love and care from their parents as sons. She is devalued and does not have the right to give her consent or to interpret or narrate.

In addition, the wealth of their son-in-law is more important than their concern for their daughter. It makes no difference if the son-in-law is sick or elderly, as long as he does not request a dowry. So, Somnath tries to convince his wife of Chuyia’s marriage when he says, “They don’t want a dowry; they will pay for the wedding” (p. 7). Dowry is a

serious concern in most Indian cultures. It is usually a custom in Indian culture that the dowry is a present of substantial monetary value that a bride takes with her to her new in-laws, a marital tradition that dates back centuries. It is also a financial restraint placed on a girl’s family—a bribe to ensure the fair treatment of the woman (Ghosh, 2013). Somnath’s responsibility is lessened, and he is fortunate enough not to collect the dowry for his daughter. Getting Chuyia married to a person who does not want dowry makes it clear that “the connection with Hira Lal’s family would benefit her household” (p. 21). So, prosperity and benefit are the only things that are considered in the girl’s match, not her opinion or satisfaction. This reflects dominance and the power of decision-making in a patriarchal society, which are the characteristics of men’s domination, oppression, and exploitation of women.

However, Chuyia’s marriage does not last long. Marriage is the only way for a woman to gain social and economic integrity, which often fades after widowhood. A widow, in Brahmin culture, ceased to exist as a person; she was no longer a daughter or a daughter-in-law. “She was viewed as a threat to society and as having no place in the community” (p. 24). “Once she [the widow] failed to be a wife, especially a barren wife, she ceased to be a person; she is neither a daughter nor a daughter-in-law,” writes Uma Chakravarti in *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (2018). Ideally, the chaste woman would cease to exist at the death of her husband by joining him on the funeral pyre, but if she did not become a sati, she became institutionally marginalized” (Chakravarti, 2018, p. 82). The plights of widows are more pitiful, as they are outcasts from society and are displaced. Displacement denotes not only the movement or removal of people from one location to another but also uprooting, in which a displaced person is deprived of “place,” his or her place being taken over by systematic violations of human rights or forced removal, as explained by Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng in *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (1998). These cases can also be viewed as emotional displacement.

After the death of Chuyia’s husband, Hiralal, she is shunned and transferred to a remote ashram meant for widows, away from her family, especially her mother, who tells her that she has to cease to exist for her loved ones. While Chuyia screams, “Baba, don’t leave me here! Baba, don’t leave me! (p. 39), her mother-in-law “firmly shuts the door of the ashram on his daughter’s fearful cries and on her life” (p. 39), which illustrates gender stereotyping and the patriarchal system by denying widows the freedom to choose their path in life. Her father looks attentively at her, but he is powerless in the hands of the powerful social

system, emphasizing the fact that in a firm dominator system, every human being is a victim of violence:

Somnath fixed his sight on her as if he intended to imprint her image in his mind forever. Each wrinkle in his worn face revealed his sorrow for her premature widowhood and the impending separation that hung over them like a plague. He finally lay his head on the stone and started to cry, giving in to the anguish that seemed to have squeezed his heart into something wrung-out and dry, releasing his anguish in half-stifled sobs that racked his body. (p. 31)

Accordingly, Gayatri Spivak (1999) states that between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of a woman disintegrates, not into a pristine nothingness but into a violent shuttling that is the dislocated figuration of "the third world woman" caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (p. 304). Somnath could not keep her at home because of the strict codes of Hindu patriarchal laws. It is devastating beyond comparison how a father could be so indifferent to his child just for the sake of carrying the burden of the strict codes of patriarchal socio-religious dogma.

Chuyia, as a diasporic character, is doubly alienated, a passive victim caught on the web of patriarchal and religious oppression. Chuyia's feelings of estrangement in a new geographical space after her shift to the ashram are all about her desire to go back home, which she perceives as her sense of belongingness: "I am not staying here. My mother is coming to get me" (p. 65). Her longing to return home is ingrained in this desolate setting. Widows are socially dead as a result of their alienated states and social marginalization. M.L. Riana argues in his article "Home, Homelessness, and the Artifice of Memory" (2007) that dislocation can occur as a result of a physical movement from one's home to an alien territory. In an article titled "The Ongoing Tragedy of India's Widows" (2012), Eva Corbabacho and Sara Barrera write that Mohini Giri, an Indian veteran activist nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, says that even among the upper castes, widowhood is social death, and widows are still accused of being responsible for their husband's death, and they are expected to live a spiritual life with many restrictions that affect them both physically and psychologically. Through Chuyia, Sidhwa highlights the rituals involved and the symbolic construction of widows.

According to the Hindu dominator system, which is distinguished by hierarchical and authoritarian systems, a widow is now seen as unlucky and unclean and poses a threat to society since she is connected to death (Eisler,

2002, pp. 159–174). The vermillion mark, bangles, necklaces, and shaving their hair to make them less beautiful as women are among the marital symbols that widows are not allowed to wear. They wear only a white sari to appear chaste and are not permitted to participate in any social activities. Uma Chakravarti (2018) claims in her examination of the symbolic meanings of the white sari and the widow shaving her head that "the colour codes of red and white are systematically sustained in the widow opposition." White stands for sexuality and death, whereas red is the colour of fertility. (p. 76). Chuyia's teeth are on edge as the razor scrapes over her scalp, but she complies and is powerless since widows have historically been held in captivity by their societies, faiths, and societal norms. The most excruciatingly painful experience someone can ever have is shaving their head, and this is Chuyia's first run-in with an identity dilemma. Sidhwa depicts widows being socially ostracized in the name of religion, rituals, and customs, implying that the construction of widows as "socially dead" is embedded in the hegemony of patriarchal tradition and religion in the Indian caste system.

In the ashram, Chuyia befriends different women from different states and cultures, creating a transnational space that allows for the exploration and highlighting of liminal space. According to Gary Bouma, the diaspora group's efforts aim to create a welcoming and energizing home away from home in that liminal space: Bouma's so-called "theory of religious settlement" (Bouma, 1996, p. 7). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that the liminal is a space where "cultural change may occur" and can be described as a "transcultural space" in which cultural, communal, or individual identities may be created; "a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (1998, p. 130). Madhumati, a beautiful woman who runs the widow's ashram, explains to Chuyia the religious obligations of a widow by saying, "In sadness, we are all sisters here, and this place is our sanctuary. In our holy texts, a woman is said to be a portion of her husband while he is alive. Right? And when husbands die, wives also half die" (p. 42). This illustrates the construction of women and widows as 'half bodies of their husbands,' a motive to promote the wife's unquestioned devotion to her husband, which examines Hindu religious patriarchal ideologies. *Water* focuses on the social construction of widows as lack, loss, and a symbol of curse, but they are used as sexual desires in patriarchal Hindu society.

Chuyia doesn't feel homely in the ashram, although she meets many widows, including Bua, Kalyani, Shakuntala, Kunti, and many more. According to Borgohain, I., and Ammari, D., the diasporic people represented in the homeland are oppressed, victimized, and

exploited individuals whose voices are silenced or unheard. Chuyia and the widows feel unwelcome and lack identity as well as representation in their host nation (p. 224). In the novel, widows are seen debating patriarchal rule's rhetoric and pursuing emancipation while being shunned and silenced (p. 224). Chuyia persistently asks Shakuntala, a pious lady, why there are no male widowers and why only women have to spend their lives in renunciation. She questions why only women have to spend their lives in renunciation. "Where is the house for men widows?" (p. 98). Chuyia is the only one who questions religious widowhood laws and sets forth questionable religious customs. Chuyia, who refuses to accept her situation, acts as a catalyst for change in the widows' lives.

The diasporic character in the book rebels against patriarchal society in several ways. Right from the beginning in the ashram, Chuyia asserts that she will not stay in the ashram because this is not her home and that her mother is coming soon to take her. Bapsi Sidhwa illustrates that widows are created as outsiders. They do not have any rights in the ashram except to follow customary rules and push the widows into the margins of not belonging. Patriarchal authority and control over female sexuality are values that are interpreted within the framework of social, economic, and political institutions in India.

Moreover, life in the widow ashram is miserable and impoverished, and the widows' only responsibilities are to pray, fast, and give their lives in penance. They are deprived of any pleasure, and the sight of these widows is regarded as a bad omen by other women. People avoid widows like the plague because they believe that if they come into contact with a widow, they will be polluted and need to perform ritual purification. In one scene, Sidhwa juxtaposes Kalyani, Chuyia, and a married woman in a bathing scene. When Kalyani, another widow, accidentally collides with a married woman, the married woman scolds her and says, "What are you doing? Widows shouldn't run around like unmarried girls. You've polluted me! I have to bathe again" (p. 83). In another scene, a priest tells Shakuntala, "Watch it. Don't let your shadow touch the bride!" (p. 89). This illustrates that nationalist ideology provokes self-representation, and widows have to negotiate with this dominance through their daily activities. The motive is to elevate the discourse of religious purity and validate the patriarchal domination of women in the name of religion.

Unquestionably, Chuyia and the other widows gradually cease to act. They are humiliated as repentance for their sins committed in previous births, and they wait in silence for their end to join their husbands. Some die old and wretched, and some are unmourned. Sidhwa writes,

"They were as accustomed to singing for long hours in temple halls to earn a few pennies and a clutch of sweets as they were to begging. Without these handouts, they would starve" (*Water*, p. 96). Gradually, they are led to prostitution for the gratification of the upper castes, who claim that their touch will bless the souls of the widows. Subeshini Moodley, in an article, observes, "Religion and social rules governing Indian women's behaviour have ultimately resulted in their oppression and patriarchal control over their bodies" (2003, p. 73). Thus, patriarchy promotes male supremacy in the spiritual and physical realms, as well as in social and personal spheres. The roots of patriarchy are difficult to change because they are so deeply rooted in the principles of control and male dominance, and this leads to gender inequality and the marginalization of women.

Furthermore, the tyrant, Madhumati, a buxom lady, keeps the oppressive traditions alive in the ashram by dictating instructions to the widows with the help of Gulabi, a eunuch (*hijra*). Madhumati, as the head of the ashram, enjoys all kinds of privileges and enjoys all things forbidden to widows to resist religious norms and to articulate that widows have always been pushed to the margins. With the help of Gulabi, they arrange the side business of prostitution to financially support the colony. The invulnerable Chuyia refuses to be subjugated by the rigid patriarchal system and challenges the patriarchal traditions, refusing to resign to her fate. Chuyia's resistance is evident when she murders Madhumati's favourite parrot out of love for Kalyani and wrath against Madhumati. Chuyia's actions illustrate her resistance to harsh and tyrannical religious discourse against widows. In another situation, one of the widows raises the question of where the cost of cremation comes from when the oldest widow dies.

Many widows, like Shakuntala and Kalyani, have patriarchal acclimatization, which makes them more obedient and conform to their widowhood. Kalyani is a lovely young widow who makes every man fall in love with her. She falls in love with a Gandhian revolutionist, Narayan, and a Brahmin, but it threatens and undermines the ashram's balance of power. A widow cannot remarry or fall in love because it threatens and undermines the ashram's balance of power. She has to respect her dead husband and live as a saint. At the same time, the hypocritical and tyrannical Madhumati, in collaboration with the eunuch, Gulabi, sends Kalyani to rich clients. Madhumati, who is the head of the widows, calls Kalyani the "jewel of the house" and says, "If you are happy, our clients are happy. And when they are happy, I am happy" (p. 152). Kalyani is forced into prostitution by Madhumati to bear the expenses of the ashram. She protests and alerts her that "this is an ashram Didi, not a brothel" (p. 152), but she has limited choice. Such is the economic vulnerability

of widows that they also have to bear their funeral expenses. Madhumati locks Kalyani in her room and shaves her hair because she resists. *Water* exposes the double standard of sexual morality that expects a woman to be modest, while the social acceptance of the 'men have needs' ideology allows men to commit infidelity and adultery by having premarital and extramarital relationships.

Bapsi Sidhwa shows that the widow's body is a space in which the meanings of her sexuality are exploited for the convenience of a patriarchal society. It is quite ironic that a religious institution like the ashram, which adheres to religious Hindu doctrine, allows widows who are cut off from the mainstream of life to be forced into prostitution to satisfy the lust of Hindu religious customs preservers. Eventually, it suggests that widows are represented as victims, and it reinforces the depiction of widows as perpetually underprivileged.

However, Kalyani challenges patriarchal sexual oppression by throwing herself into the holy Ganges. "She clasped her hands in prayer for a moment, then calmly walked into the river until her short hair floated in an inky stain on the water" (p. 178). She drowns herself after she finds out that Narayan's father has been a customer of Kalyani's. Kalyani's suicide was both her solution to all of her problems and her rejection of religious discourse. Kalyani realizes that "cast out in the streets she would die, but to live without Narayan and return to a life of forced prostitution would be a worse kind of death" (p. 177). Madhumati mistreats her cruelly, and she can no longer withstand living as a passive victim of patriarchal oppression. She has challenged oppression and rejected patriarchal demands on a woman's body by killing herself. As a result, *Water* adopts an identity as a barrier, displaces and isolates widows from normal citizens, and accepts defeat in the face of society's restrictive laws. By focusing on death, Sidhwa depicts the dilemmas and sexual, social, and economic exploitation of widows.

After Kalyani's death, Madhumati tries to push Chuyia into prostitution as a replacement for Kalyani, on the pretext of sending Chuyia to her parents' home. Chuyia, as a child, is unaware of the adult world, but luck is on her side. Shakuntala sees Chuyia being taken by Gulabi in a boat, and her rage knows no bounds. Seeing Shakuntala's rage, Gulabi saves herself from her wrath by running away. Shakuntala sprinkles water on Chuyia's face, which seems to have been drugged, saves Chuyia's life from routine prostitution, and redeems her life (p. 226). Shakuntala, ferocious as a lioness, joins a throng that transports her to the railway station to meet Gandhiji, battering Chuyia in her lap and in inner agony.

To conclude, all of Sidhwa's characters are away from their natal homes, living in diasporic conditions, which are often characterized by a sense of non-belonging and hostility. Chuyia, Kalyani, and Shakuntala face identity dilemmas, and their identities propose that the widows are not only victims but also shaped and colonized by upper-caste Hindu patriarchal discourses. "The space" takes on a hybrid and mediated meaning in the ashram's liminal space as new roots are formed and the colonized psyche becomes displaced, alienated, isolated, and psychologically distorted. They must, however, deal with self-contradiction to survive. The various ways Chuyia, Shakuntala, and Kalyani communicate in various situations suggest how they overcome hostile conditions, struggle, and resist for survival. Shakuntala's real transformation came after Kalyani's death. In the end, she carries the frail body of Chuyia to the train station, where Gandhi has been communicating with his supporters during a brief stop. She, holding Chuyia in her arms, follows the train carrying the Gandhian movement members and asks them to take Chuyia with them. Chuyia eventually succeeds in leaving behind the pitiful condition of widows as Shakuntala entrusts her frail body to Gandhi's patronage to give her a new life. Shakuntala eventually saves Chuyia by handing her over to the care of Gandhi, thus signaling a ray of hope and the beginning of new journeys.

III. CONCLUSION

The themes of migration and home are prominently included throughout Bapsi Sidhwa's narrative in *Water*. Chuyia and the other widows have finally decided to make the ashram their home, although it was not of their choosing, and this decision has caused a shift in their identities. The novel demonstrates how widows develop unique coping mechanisms for dealing with the difficulties and suffering associated with reinventing themselves in new environments. Contrarily, even if they succeed in adjusting culturally, the widows in the novel are still alienated and ostracized because of their affiliations and are required to conform to patriarchal norms and ideals in order to have a sense of belonging in their new environments. Chuyia and the other widows are revealing their diasporic consciousness and some bad experiences they had as widows in an ashram controlled by a patriarchal culture through their collective "homemaking" gesture. Bapsi Sidhwa depicts widows who all actively engage with the status quo of Indian patriarchal culture in their assimilation and homemaking.

It's possible that these diasporic migrants yearn for homes that are exactly like the ones built by members of mainstream society but are denied those rights, or that

occasionally they build homes that are very different from the mainstream model solely because of restrictions placed on them by mainstream society. Uprooting from one's home into a constrained environment without freedom is a challenging task. It argued how the characters underwent identity transformations as they were forced to face the interaction between the normal Indian culture and the patriarchal norms for widows. However, at the end, through her journey from an outcast to a free Gandhian movement member, Chuyia was able to escape the relative "fixity" provided by her patriarchal society, offering a glimmer of hope.

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